

The Atlantic Connection

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Bridge Lessons

At a dozen tables in a large, well-lit room, groups of four people sit in deep concentration, focused on a handful of playing cards. The quiet is occasionally broken by casual conversation peppered with terms like “crossruff,” “trump” or “finesse.”

That’s the scene at The Bridge Studio, a duplicate bridge club in Halifax’s West End Mall, where players ranging in age from 11 to 93 gather to play their favorite game. “Bridge is the world’s greatest game of the mind,” said club co-manager Balon Buckley. “It’s stimulating and challenging and it also provides the ideal setting for socializing with interesting people and making new friends.” Buckley and his business partner Kathie Macnab have been teaching bridge and organizing bridge games for more than a decade.

The Bridge Studio is one of 3300 clubs organized under the non-profit American Contract Bridge League, the world’s largest bridge organization with 165,000 members in Canada, the United States, Mexico and Bermuda. The ACBL issues “masterpoints” to players competing at ACBL-sanctioned clubs, and at 1200 bridge tournaments in North America each year. The primary goal of ACBL members is to achieve the rank of Life Master, requiring 300 masterpoints.

Bridge traces its origins to the British game of whist, first played in the 16th century. The modern game was developed in

the 1920’s by American millionaire Harold Vanderbilt, who came up with the early scoring system. Today, the game is played all over the globe and has even been recognized as a sport by the International Olympic Committee. The 4th IOC Grand Prix championship, held in conjunction with the 2002 Salt Lake City games, was won by a Canadian men’s team.

Such is the appeal of bridge, it counts among its devotees tennis star Martina Navratilova, investor Warren Buffett, and Microsoft founder Bill Gates. “It’s a game you can play at any age,” Gates said. “If you take it up young, you have fun doing it the rest of your life. A lot of games don’t have that depth. This one does.” Microsoft’s online Gaming Zone features a popular bridge-playing site.

Not only is playing bridge fun, it is part of a healthy lifestyle. According to a study at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, “playing chess, bridge or a musical instrument significantly lowers the risk of Developing Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia.” And research at the University of California-Berkeley used bridge players to study the effect of mental activity in boosting the immune system. “Bridge players plan ahead, they use working memory, they deal with sequencing, initiation and numerous other higher order functions,” said professor Marian Cleaves Diamond. After playing bridge, players in her study showed an increase in T

cells, the white blood cells which patrol the body in search of viruses and other invaders.

Bridge’s beneficial side effects are no surprise to Bridge Studio staff, “Children learning bridge also learn reasoning and logic skills and have fun doing it,” says Macnab, involved in the Bridge in Schools Program and has taught students from grades 5 to 12. “And the game keeps older players sharp. Some of our best players are in their 70’s and 80’s, and many more have become Life Masters after retirement. You may not be able to golf or play tennis forever; but you can play bridge all your life,” she adds.

At The Bridge Studio people of all ages and playing abilities have the opportunity to play this exciting game of bridge at one of our many schedule games. The Bridge Studio also offers bridge lessons from Halifax’s most qualified bridge instructors. The Bridge Studio will be offering everyone a chance to see how the game is played and why millions of people around the world are so intrigued with the game of Bridge. Join them for a FREE lesson on Monday September 13th at 7:30 pm, Wednesday September 15th at 9:30pm or Friday September 17th at 9:30am.

The Bridge Studio is located on the second level, suite 26a, of the West End Mall. Drop in or call us at 446-3910 or visit our fascinating web site – www.bridgestudio.org.